TRANSFORMING CHURCHES, TRANSFORMING LIVES
Southeast Conference UNITED CHURCH of CHRIST

A Word From Tim Downs - August

Our Church's Wider Mission

Dear Friends,

On August 1, I had surgery for a partial knee replacement followed by a brief hospital stay. My recuperation continues at home with daily flexing of the knee for six hours and an hour or so of exercise. I have to keep my leg prone, so mobility, as we say "has been compromised". I say all this not for cards or sympathy, but to set context. The past three weeks have turned out to be a very rich time of prayer, reading, reflection, wonderful conversations and correspondence with colleagues, family and friends.

There have been particular matters that have drawn my attention and thought. Let me share one of them. Before I left the office for this time away, I looked at the treasurer's report for the conference and noted that at the end of June giving by churches to OCWM (Our Church's Wider Mission) Basic Support was $30,000 behind where it was at this time last year. With an annual budgeted figure of $300,000 for OCWM in 2011, that is a significant number. Without going further into the figures, I do not know whether there is a pattern or cause for concern. Therefore, raising this matter is not my effort to induce panic or arouse guilt, but instead to invite reflection on the question "why is this?"

Some might say that this $30,000 shortfall is one reflection of the malaise that is settling over our nation. We may be on the cusp of a second recession and unemployment remains tenaciously high. Our children are unable to find jobs; our political leaders disappoint us by their lack of vision, imagination or even basic leadership. They too often resort to the cheapest impulses of politics, fear, blame, xenophobia, cowardice. In the midst of this uncertainty, some of our congregations lack confidence, or hope for their future. This may be. However, this season of economic and social malaise is not new, and to this point, many of our churches have continued to support our shared ministries and missions through OCWM in a spirit of abundance and not out of a fear of scarcity. Therefore, if this is a part of it, it is not the sum of it.

Others might say, "Well, we are behind in giving because live in a post-denominational age. People just do not value denominations, their purpose and roles the way their parents did Institutional loyalty have faded, they don't join the Rotary Club and Elks Lodge the way they used to and they frankly don't see the purpose of church, let alone denominations." This truth is widely repeated in mainline denominational settings, but consider this: While the United Church of Christ and all mainline churches are in significant decline, the Southeast Conference has defied that trend, doubling in size in the last decade. We look forward to similar growth in the next decade. We have attracted extraordinary leadership, seen major increases in giving to our mission, and doubled our budget in ten years.

Repeatedly, people approach me to say, "I never knew that there was a church like the United Church of Christ, thank God!" In addition, "I did not know that followers of Christ would take his life and preaching fully to heart, and welcome the outcast, proclaim a Gospel of grace, not judgment, seek to be signs of God's redemptive purpose not only in the human heart but in the world." Said another way, we are a people who understand that justice take place when love growth legs and walks in the world. If we live in a post-denominational world, in many ways, I believe that the UCC and the Southeast Conference are well equipped to live into a post-denominational reality.

Perhaps we are $30,000 off last year's giving because local churches see OCWM (Our Church's Wider Mission) Basic Support as "out there", "not us". When I was a local church pastor, I often sat in Finance Committee meetings facing the grim news again that "we just can't balance our budget, it's time to cut OCWM again. After all, OCWM doesn't touch our lives." I found this an interesting train of thought for a church, which turned unselfconsciously to the conference to seek a new pastor, scholarship for a seminarian, to assist with a conflict or a stewardship program. In the Southeast, we do all this and more. We bring a TAP group in to train your leaders at your request, provide coaching and support for your pastor. If there is one message that I want to be sure in heard it is that "OCWM is not about THEM out there, it is about US, all of us, all of us together."

Of course, there is something bigger in giving through OCWM than the ways in which it equips a conference to serve us in our local churches. In the United Church of Christ, we often talk of covenant as that quality of relationship that binds us to one another and to God. There is a covenant between local congregations and the conference. Each local congregation is the presence of the United Church of Christ in its place and time. The conference has a sacred covenant to support and nurture that presence of our mission by strengthening it and equipping it. Likewise, each congregation has a sacred covenant with the conference to strengthen and equip it. We need each other to live fully into the mission to which God has called us, supporting each other "on every leaning side".

One of the most identifiable characteristics of the United Church of Christ is that we are the people of "a still speaking God." The God is Still Speaking campaign, which originated in the national setting of the church, was the

in the national setting of the church, was the result of tremendous creativity and devotion of resources. It has had a dramatic impact on most of the churches of this conference, many of whom will proudly say at the beginning of a worship service; “no matter whom you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcomed here.” This shared identity is another piece of our covenant, in which we claim a common value together.

Some of you were at the Annual Meeting of the conference, which took place at Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta in June. You heard Gary Myers, the pastor of Trinity Congregational UCC in Athens, AL, stand up and say the following. “If you ever have wondered whether OCWM giving makes a difference, I am here to tell you that the day after the hurricanes ripped through my community, and tore through the homes of my members, I received a call from the conference. Shortly after that, we received support with which we reached out to our community. You were there for US because you give to OCWM; you made a difference!” OCWM is not just about you, or about the local churches, the conference and us, it is also the way in which we are presented to a wounded and grieving world. It is in this way that we work to bring hope and wholeness with our partner churches around the world. Through it, we bring messages of peace, of justice and of grace.

So, if the Conference ends 2011 in a deficit will there is a crisis? I have learned that “crying wolf” about deficits in the local church and in the conference does not tend to generate generosity but anxiety. My assurance is that the conference will be here and the best of our ability to support you and our ministries around the world. We can muddle through. Nevertheless, doesn’t God deserve a little better from us than “muddling through?” We in the Southeast Conference have always been a people, whose vision is our greatest gift, and it has gotten us through seasons of scarcity and times of fear, but I believe that we truly do have the capacity to equip our vision, with leaders, with prayer, and yes, with giving. I have written, “This is not about YOU this is about US.” However, you know, of course, it is about YOU, because you are a precious and inseparable part of US.

I hope that over the coming years, OCWM will not be at the bottom of your congregation’s commitments, but be at the top of that pile. I hope too that you will be able to find it in your hearts to respond with joy at the opportunity to be a part of a ministry that has touched so many around the world, beginning in your own pews, and walking with love and justice around the world.

Peace,

Tim Downs, *Conference Minister*
Timothy C. DownsTimothy C. Downs

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TRANSFORMING CHURCHES, TRANSFORMING LIVES

Southeast Conference UNITED CHURCH of CHRIST

YOU ARE HERE: HOME ▸ LOCAL CHURCH NEWS

News From Our Local Churches - August

Pastor Michael Garrett Announced his Resignation

After a successful 15 year ministry at First Congregational Church UCC, Montgomery, AL, Pastor Michael Garrett announced his resignation two months ago. Michael led the church through a rebuilding program after their sanctuary was destroyed by fire in 1995. We wish Michael and his family well.

UCC News

UCC Newsroom

Headlines from the United Church of Christ

New Media Project examines church's use of emerging technologies

Just three months into its launch, the New Media Project at Union Theological Seminary has already gained footing in exploring improved ways in which pastors and lay leaders might use new technologies to strengthen their communities.

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Lifting Up . . .August

Kathy Clark, Associate Conference Minister and her family at the death of her sister-in-law and housemate **Judy Jones**. Please keep Kathy's sister Jacki, Judy's partner of 20 years, in your prayers.

Our prayers are with **Artis Johnson**, pastor of Evergreen Congregational Church UCC, Beachton, GA as he recovers from knee surgery complicated by diabetes.

We continue to pray for **Tim Downs** as he continues his recovery from surgery on August 1, 2011.

Our thoughts and prayers were with **Mike Grello's** family and friends at the TAP graduation. He would have graduated with this TAP group had he lived. Mike is seated on left in photo. Mike was remembered as a larger than life figure, not just because of his commanding presence, but also because of his intelligence, commitment to critical thinking and to social justice, his deep faith, and for his willingness to speak truth to power with regard to all of the above.

The TAP group truly missed him during the study of Hebrew Prophets and Social Transformation because they knew his contributions in this area would have been great. He will be dearly missed by his family, the TAP group and the Garden of Grace congregation.

We ask for prayers for all **students and teachers** for a safe and successful school year.

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Headlines from the United Church of Christ

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Just three months into its launch, the New Media Project at Union Theological Seminary has already gained footing in exploring improved ways in which pastors and lay leaders might use new technologies to strengthen their communities.

THE CENTER FOR PROGRESSIVE RENEWAL

TRANSFORMING CHURCHES, TRANSFORMING LIVES
Southeast Conference
UNITED CHURCH of CHRIST

Our Church's Wider Mission | A Call to Celebrate!

Sunday, September 18, 2011

The Southeast Conference thanks each of our local churches for your continuing generosity to OCWM (Our Church's Wider Mission). There are challenges ahead of us as we continue through 2011 and 2012. We know that most understand that the health and vitality of the mission and ministries of the Southeast Conference and the entire United Church of Christ rely heavily on our faithful support of OCWM. Our churches are invited to make a special effort to educate their members about the ministries that are made possible through OCWM and celebrate them on Sunday, September 18. You might invite a member of the Board of Directors of the Conference or the staff to be with you on the 18th. We have a brochure that interprets the mission of OCWM, which you can download from this link. There also are wonderful additional resources on the UCC website including a PowerPoint and a video, which you can show in worship, or at an adult education event.

OCWM

We are proud that in 2010 16% or eight of our churches were Covenant Keepers that is, committed 10% or more of their operating budget to OCWM Basic Support. Another 15 of our churches are Strive to Tithers who have committed to raising their giving 1% a year from the level of 5% until they become a Covenant Keeping church. We are proud too that we have reduced the number of churches giving nothing to OCWM from 15 to eight. We invite your congregation if you are not one of the Covenant Keepers to join us in this support of our common mission. In 2011, we have budgeted for a 10% increase in OCWM Basic Support from local churches. Your voice of advocacy and support in your congregation is important for us to reach this goal. As you know, in the Southeast Conference we have worked hard to maintain our level of support for the whole United Church of Christ, as well as to strengthen our services and programs for you, our local churches.

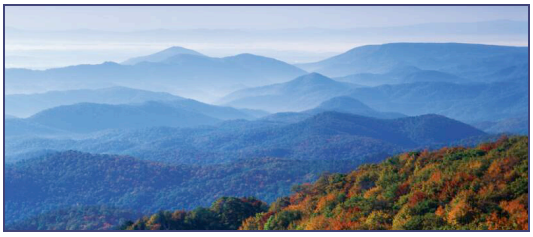
I often hear the question, "OCWM, what's in it for me?" It is OCWM that brings you support for your search for a new pastor, or makes possible church school curricula. It makes possible the support of your staff and leaders in conflict or transition. OCWM brings you the TAP (Theology Among the People) program to equip your lay ministries and is a part of developing PATHWAYS to train our future ministers. Through it, we provide opportunities for work camps to serve others in need, involvement in global ministries, and much more. Together we can be a strong and missional church in the name of Jesus Christ." OCWM: it changes lives, not only the lives of others, but our lives as well. Contact Gerri Hudson or Tim Downs for resources and support to help you find ways to tell the OCWM story.

TRANSFORMING CHURCHES, TRANSFORMING LIVES
Southeast Conference UNITED CHURCH of CHRIST

Conference News - August

OCWM Sunday - Come and Celebrate
The Southeast Conference has called for churches to celebrate OCWM Sunday on **September 18th**, to help us all understand that OCWM is about "US." Link here to read more about OCWM Sunday.

Alabama-Tennessee Fall Meeting
We invite you to our Annual AL-TN Association fall meeting **"Making Connections."** The meeting will be held at Howard Congregational Church United Church of Christ in Nashville, Tennessee. The meetings will begin on Friday, September 30, 2011 and conclude on Saturday afternoon, October 1, 2011. Come join us in "Making Connections" building leaders and building congregations. Link here for additional information for the fall event.



United Church of Christ Women's Southern Regional Meeting - Make Plans to Join Us!

The Southern Regional Women's Meeting takes place **October 7 – 9** in beautiful **Blowing Rock, North Carolina**.

Now is the time to take action. The Deadline is Wednesday, September 14.

Financial help is available from the Southeast Conference Women's Mite Fund.
The theme is **"A Faith Inspired Look Toward Wholeness"** planned by women from Southern, Southeast, Florida and South Central conferences of the UCC. Ms. Barbara Baylor of the U.C.C. national staff will give the keynote speaker.
Among the workshop leaders are Rev. Dorothy Gager, Rev. Gwen Thomas, Ms. Jo Sherer, and Ms. Joan Gittings from the Southeast Conference with great topics to share.

Make your plans with your fellow members and friends, UCC.

Celebrate Global Ministries

Has your congregation chosen a date to celebrate Global Ministries Sunday this fall?

Global Ministries Sunday is a new initiative to help congregations put a face on Disciples and UCC ministries of Critical Presence with partners around the globe. The chosen Sunday will be a special time to focus on global mission education and to take steps to engage in God's mission with Global Ministries. Check out our website for many sermon resources and additional information.

On Sunday, August 21, 2011 please pray for India.
The Henry family are commissioned by the Southeast Conference as global missionaries. Follow this link to read more about India and the Henry family serving on our behalf as missionaries.

2011 Atlanta Music Festival: Songs of Aspiration, Hope, and Progress

In 1910 members of First Congregational Church were denied admittance to Metropolitan Opera performances in Atlanta. Their response was the creation of the "Atlanta Colored Music Festival," which featured the most prominent African American concert artists of the time. Dwight Andrews, pastor of Atlanta's First Congregational Church, in association with Emory University has revived his congregation's music festival tradition in a ten-year collaboration with Steven Darsey and Meridian Herald. Tickets to the concert may be purchased by contacting the Emory Box office directly at 404-727-5050. Link to Emory's website to read more about this event.

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TRANSFORMING CHURCHES, TRANSFORMING LIVES
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YOU ARE HERE: HOME ▸ CELEBRATE

Celebrations August 2011

We are pleased to announce that the **Georgia-South Carolina Association** has extended an invitation to all of its congregations to be a part of the service of installation for **Dr. Larry Evans** as pastor of Midway Congregational Church UCC, Midway, GA on **Sunday, October 9** at 4:00 p.m.

Larry, a licensed therapist and ordained UCC minister, has served on the faculty of Lancaster Theological Seminary before coming to Midway, and has served as the pastor of Central Congregational Church UCC in New Orleans.

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Alabama-Tennessee
Association
United Church of Christ

August 19, 2011

Grace and Peace to You:

We invite you to our Annual Fall Meeting in Nashville, Tennessee at Howard Congregational Church United Church of Christ. Our meeting will begin on Friday, September 30, 2011 and conclude on Saturday afternoon, October 1, 2011. "Making Connections" is our theme for this gathering and our divinity students from Vanderbilt University will be our primary participants. The purpose of this gathering is to begin living out our conference campaign in building covenant and connection, building leaders, and building congregations. Come join us in "Making Connections."

Yours in Christ,

Gary Luther Myers

Gary Luther Myers, Moderator

"MAKING CONNECTIONS"

Moderator: Gary Luther Myers
Pastor Christophe Ringer and Howard Congregational United Church of Christ

INVITE YOU TO THE FALL MEETING OF ALABAMA-TENNESSEE ASSOCIATION UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

SEPTEMBER 30- OCTOBER 1, 2011

AT HOWARD CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH of CHRIST
2802 Buchanan Street
Nashville, TN 37208

FEATURING

Worship and Prayer led by students from Vanderbilt Divinity School
Conversations on Feminine Images of God, Queer Theology, and the Reality of Heaven and Hell
An Ecclesiastical Council for Benjamin Robert Konecny

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2011

- **4:00PM [CST]** Registration Begins
- **6:00PM** Dinner begins at 6:00PM
- **7:15PM** Opening Worship Starts
  Led by Worship team: Vanderbilt Divinity School

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2011

- **8:00AM** Registration and Continental Breakfast
- **8:30AM** Opening Prayer
- **9-10:30AM** Conversation groups led by Vanderbilt Divinity Students [Locations: Sanctuary & Fellowship Hall]

- **9-9:40AM** Queer Theology [Fellowship Hall]
- **9-9:40AM** Heaven and Hell [Sanctuary]
- **9:50-10:30AM** Feminine Images of God [Fellowship Hall]
- **9:50-10:30AM** Heaven and Hell [Sanctuary]

- **10:45AM -** Ecclesiastical Council for Benjamin Konecny

- **12:00PM** Lunch & sharing news around the association and conference/ Departure

ALABAMA-TENNESSEE ASSOCIATION UCC
FALL GATHERING
HOWARD CONGREGATIONAL UCC

September 30- October 1, 2011

REGISTRATION FORM

[DUPLICATE THIS FORM AS NEEDED TO SUBMIT ONE FORM PER PERSON]

NAME **On Name Tag**

ADDRESS

Home phone **Cell phone** **Email**

Church Name/City& State

$ **REGISTRATION FEE ENCLOSED**

REGISTRATION FEE IS $25.00 [includes Friday dinner, Saturday continental breakfast, and lunch]

Make Check Payable to: HOWARD CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH UCC

Please send a legible print completed form and check to:
Wanda Akins
Howard Congregational UCC
2802 Buchanan Street
Nashville, TN 37208-1900

REGISTRATION POSTMARKED DEADLINE SEPTEMBER 23,2011

LODGING ACCOMADATIONS

Participants should book their own hotel rooms. Please advise the hotel that you are with the Alabama-Tennessee Association United Church of Christ. **Be sure to book rooms by September 15, 2011 to get the rates listed below.**

[1] DAYS INN
221 N. 1st Street
Nashville, TN 37213
Phone# 615-254-1551
Room rate: $65.00 for rooms booked by September 15, 2011.

[2] COMFORT INN
412 White Bridge Place
Nashville, TN 37209
Phone# 615-356-0888
Room rate: $75.00 for rooms booked by September 15, 2011.